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"LET'S ORGANIZE AN INTERRACIAL COMMITTEE"

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In addition to the nervous strains which Uncle Sam is enduring in the promotion of a world-wide military campaign, he is suffering from a severe headache which some folk refer to as "the race problem." He has had this headache with recurring frequency and intensity for many years, but has failed to do much about the condition except take an occasional sedative to relieve the pain for the moment. Well-meaning counsellors have advised him from time to time what to do about it, as well-meaning friends usually do, while others try to convince him that the best treatment is to let it alone and permit nature to remedy the situation.

The pathology of the headache, whether in the body physical or the body politic, attaches much greater seriousness to the condition than the advice of casual friends would seem to indicate. The headache is merely the symptom of an underlying difficulty. It may be migraine, for which little can be done--and of course, there are those who advise Uncle Sam that this is his trouble. Then again, it may be the symptom of self-neglect, in which situation something must be done before a chronic condition develops that will impair permanently his strength, vitality and activity during the full bloom of his maturity.

Recently, Uncle Sam's headache has become more painful and oppressive. He has continued to absorb aspirin tablets, but recourse to sedatives for so long a period, and particularly during these periods of stress, are requiring an increased dosage which are less efficacious in the results obtained. The condition is becoming so serious that those of us who are interested in seeing him enjoy a long, healthy and happy life, must induce him to submit to skilled treatment. *because*

Whether or not the foregoing analogy is likely to induce objective thinking upon a subject which has been colored by much emotionalism, the fact remains that it pictures a factual and disturbing parallel to the state of race relations in the United States. Government fears to seek and admit the presence of the underlying causes--treatment may be hazardous and painful. Demagogues argue that to admit that there is a headache will increase the agony--so resort to the *Coca-Cola* treatment. Many liberal-minded supporters of the pain-wracked victim, volunteer well-meaning but frequently inept advice which highly recommends the homeopathic concoction which cured Aunt Hetty of the toothache and Cousin Willie of the D.T.'s. *no problem*

The disturbing trend in racial relations deserves more serious treatment than this facetious analogy may seem to give, for in truth, America is being drawn closer and closer into the maelstrom of passion which culminates in civil strife. Every new gain experienced by Negroes brings forth anguished wails from reactionary elements. The shouting and the tumult could be tolerated but for the fact that they merely preface determined campaigns of reprisal against agencies, departments or individuals who can be coerced by political pressure or seduced by threats of

budget curtailment. These reprisals, in turn, further aggravate the fears and insecurity of the Negro, and the vicious cycle of action and counter-action is in full swing.

In the mad whirl of reaction and repression, public housing, labor organization, food subsidies and public relations policies have felt the shock of attacks which have pilloried liberal-minded leaders and emasculated progressive programs offering any hope to the exploited Negro minority. The flood of hate released to these efforts, by its own momentum, in turn engulfs other segments of the population, and the forces of reaction turn upon the War administration and all that it proposes. Thus, the Soldiers' Vote Bill was opposed ostensibly as an administration measure to "invade States Rights"; the Poll-tax bill pigeon-holed for the same reason. Actually, they are being opposed for the single purpose of perpetuating the system of oligarchy which has made a mock of American Democracy throughout our national history. We have no more colorful, articulate authority for this conclusion than the Hon. (sic) John E. Rankin, U. S. Representative who stated for the Congressional Record and Mississippi voters that "Our boys are fighting the war to maintain white supremacy."

and anti-lynching

Less notorious figures in all parts of the country are throwing themselves vigorously into the campaign of hate. Civilians in training camp areas declare "open season" on black soldiers; martinets in the several branches of Service create their own particular codes of law and ethics in dealing with Negro or Jewish servicemen; selfish employers and labor leaders relegate National Unity to a position that runs a poor third place, while self-interest and "keeping the N.... in his place" lead by a full length. And, the head of the national "morale building organization, the U.S.O. orders removal of a pamphlet which objectively exposes the poison hidden in the bitter fruit being dispensed so freely!

What is it all about? Is it that there is an innately inspired antipathy between whites and Negroes? Are Negroes being unduly contentious in claiming first-class citizenship? Are politically-ambitious leaders of both racial groups--and the Negro and liberal white press--whipping Negro emotions into a state of consciousness of and resentment against the operation of "Nature's immutable law" of segregation and discrimination? The loud chorus of affirmative answers that would greet each of these questions indicates the kind of job that must be done by the large body of interested, enlightened, but slightly confused citizens.

Of course, unadulterated race hatred does exist in America, but it is not nearly as prevalent as many Negroes fear or worried whites believe. What passes for "race hatred" in the majority of situations is a blind obedience to a national tradition, accentuated by fear and insecurity. The tradition has been passed down with the other emotional heritages of Political Party and Church. Fear and insecurity have been acquired by the most frighteningly insidious campaign of miseducation in the records of modern journalism and pedagogy. It has been the experience of every Negro in public life to be told by the fear-goaded slave

of "the tradition", of the Negro schoolmate who was "one of my best friends." Intense racial antipathy permits no such weakness or confession! Inequality, which is much more stultifying in its effect than mere provincialism, does produce this effect, meanwhile stoutly defending and justifying its myopia.

If the "fence-sitting" portion of white America were convinced: (1) that the race problem in America does not spring from instinctive antipathies therefore amenable to change; (2) that they themselves are timid and confused victims of a program of miseducation; and (3) that reaction, which starts its crusade against a weak minority, eventually enslaves the majority, the native sense of justice and decency would be challenged into action. An enlightened mind abhors the shadows of superstition as Nature abhors a vacuum.

"LET'S DO SOMETHING"

As a matter of record, this enlightened transition is occurring in America. Liberal white opinion is growing greater in volume and more uncompromising in its expression. Interracial activities are being initiated in small town and large, and the light of this growing opinion is being reflected in the periodicals and press of the nation. The one major question to which this article is addressed is: can this gradual transition be accelerated and guided into more productive channels, that it may be wielded more effectively in combatting the emotional weapons employed by the reactionary?

In attempting an answer to this question, the writer is not concerning himself with theoretical or philosophic content of program for national application. This article will hope to provide a blue-print for action in the smallest, local unit, at the very grass-roots of democratic expression--the local working committee. It is from this same source that anti-democratic forces find the springboard which catapult them into national prominence.

Is this a task which requires the mobilization of Negroes only? Of white citizens? Or, of both groups operating independently of the other? Aside from the question of principle, there are two practical reasons for rejecting each of the foregoing questions. If racial misunderstandings draw substance from the suspicions and fears engendered by separatism, it isn't logical to combat misunderstanding through employment of the same blighting processes. The emotionalism, misinformation and formless suspicion which characterize racial relations in America, are present in members of both groups. Complete objectivity is rare in either group, particularly among lay-people in the average local community. A program formulated by either, to the complete exclusion of the other, will more than likely be colored by the prejudices of the one group. To the degree to which this occurs the tendency is to strengthen the suspicions and fears of the excluded group and create opposition where cooperation is needed.

It has been general recognition of this fact that has inspired the formation of local interracial committees. So formidable did the single task of organizing the group seem, that the tried and true mechanics of forming community organizations in less emotionalized areas were discarded. Consequently, the "traditional" type of interracial committee was formed by earnest and zealous persons of both groups; met formally and discreetly in the best homes and churches; had inspiring talks and lustily intoned Spirituals; drank tea and went home. Controversial subjects were taboo and seldom did any person of the group have an opportunity really to know any other member of the group. Each person was on his good behavior; presented carefully inhibited "company manners"; and feared to challenge the group to dynamic action on any issue because he had no measure of the social stature of the group.

Another type of interracial activity, which again has ignored the basic rules of community organization, has been the "omnibus", functional group. Organized usually by direct actionists it assumes the full burden of correcting all evils on the interracial front. Individuals of both racial groups, desiring to make a contribution to the cause of interracial cooperation and justice, found themselves drawn deeper and deeper into issues about which they held certain, personal reservations. If a Negro member objected to a proposed action or to method of approach, he promptly was labelled a "Judas" or "handkerchief head." If a white member demurred because of the impracticability of an issue, he was listed as "insincere" or "just like the rest of them." Out of such unscientific and illogical controversies have come much disillusionment, bitterness and community apathy. In each case, the disintegration of the committee has furnished further "evidence" to those seeking substantiation of their arguments, that Negroes and whites just cannot work together.

TAKE OFF THE SMOKED GLASSES

The experiences gained in many American communities through the failure of committees which have followed the procedures outlined above, should emphasize even greater need for clear-sighted planning (or local interracial organization) than would be required in any other area of interest. Paradoxically, the first impulse to "form an interracial committee" should be squelched promptly! What is the important objective--merely to bring together an oddly assorted group of colored and white citizens? Or, is it to assemble a group of citizens whose interests and experiences would suggest their participation in a specific community function? It would seem that the latter method most nearly conforms to accepted organizational procedures. Why, then, bedevil the issue by summoning all the ghosts, demons and spectres of racial emotionalism by emphasizing the "interracial" association taboo?

The movement, presumably, is being initiated for the dual purpose, first, of getting colored and white people to meet, understand and work together; and secondly, to attack various forms of bigotry and discrimination in the community. The rallying call is

this, or any other effective organizational effort, should center upon an objective which, in the main, is a matter of interest to the individual members to be attracted to the movement. The emotional conditioning of the average American; his limited understanding of his other-colored brother's reservations; and his usual inability to comprehend fully the many ramifications of the problem, are the several factors which have led to the undoing of organizations built around the vague, and truly naive, objective of "achieving interracial understanding."

The American racial problem encompasses the whole range of social and economic problems, with the added factor of race accentuating the whole. It is a rare person who will commit himself to "all-out" social and economic reform, even when the race factor is absent. It is naive to expect interest in race relations, *per se*, to overcome the many reservations held by people, who for sentimental or practical reasons may have been attracted to the movement.

The vague or sentimental racial interest of a white member may well find expression in efforts to improve housing or provide recreational facilities for Negro citizens. It may, however, violently reject a proposal to oppose the poll-tax or support a civil rights suit against a theatre or restaurant. The Negro member may contend vigorously for all these things, and more, and be bitterly impatient with signs of caution or unwillingness exhibited by his white co-worker. Each point of view displays a positive and dynamic interest which by degrees becomes dampened for the single reason that a specific objective has not been supplied as a channel for their mutual interest, stride and tempo.

An interesting experiment is being conducted in Newark to test the validity and practicability of these observations. The one-time "traditional" interracial council chose as its major objective that of opening the doors of local hospitals to Negro trainees and professionals. After several years of persistent endeavor, the first nurse-trainee and two graduate nurses have been placed. A second committee centers its attention on intercultural education in the public schools and in two years has achieved marked success. A third group, about a year old, concentrates upon the press, pulpit and city administration as agencies which shape public opinion. Relatively few persons serve all, or even two of the committees. The memberships are drawn from among citizens whose primary interests were in the fields of health, education and public relations, respectively. It "just happened" that they were colored and white citizens, and that their program emphasis applied to race relations. There is mutual understanding and respect between the organizations, and close coordination of their several efforts maintained. It should be noted that each is a completely autonomous and uninhibited citizens' movement.

In the operations of these groups, no member is strained to move beyond the limit of his personal reservations, his time limitations, or his social interests. He enlisted for the specific task which is the committee's objective, but in its doing, is receiving a gradual but certain education in personal relations across race lines; in the intricacies of the race problem; and in the specialized techniques which have evolved in dealing with the question.

Thus, the friction resulting from natural clashes between the importunate and the reserved members, is reduced to the minimum. The enthusiasm and directed energies of all are utilized to the maximum. Meantime, three times as many people are giving prestige to the cause of the black minority and interracial association; three times as many people are growing out of insularity and into racial understanding, by the simple, well-known method of working together; rejoicing over accomplishments, commiserating over failures; agreeing and disagreeing but uniting on dignified compromises--TOGETHER!

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